



PDF Complete

Your complimentary use period has ended.
Thank you for using PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

[send to printer](#)

September 18-24, 2003

CITYSPACE

Happy Anniversary



Cityspace looks ahead, not behind, after its first year.

by Alan Greenberger

View Finder: "Keeping the city vibrant, beautiful and accessible has got to be a priority." Photo By: Michael T. Regan

This installment of Cityspace marks its one-year anniversary. A joint invention of the *City Paper* and the Design Advocacy Group, this column has brought you a variety of voices that analyze, critique, praise and sometimes rant about the state of our physical environment. Most anniversary issues offer a highlight reel of past heroic efforts. This one won't.

Instead, I would like to use the occasion to report on what might be a megatrend in Philadelphia. Right now, it's only a trendlet, but if it blossoms and takes root, something extraordinarily good will happen. Here is the situation:

We have been interviewing recent graduates of architecture school for employment in our firm. In the last week, I sat in on six such interviews. None of the six candidates originally hailed from Philadelphia. They were from Oregon, Ohio, Wisconsin, Tennessee, Michigan and Indonesia. Two were graduates of the University of Pennsylvania. The other four were graduates of the University of Virginia, University of Oklahoma, University of Cincinnati and the University of Wisconsin.

Some were just out of school, while others had been in the work force for several years. None of them had close family connections in Philadelphia or had significant others who had to be here. All of them had carefully researched where they wanted to be because -- as young, educated, childless professionals -- they had choices and they had mobility.

All of them -- repeat, all of them -- said they wanted to either stay in or move to Philadelphia to practice architecture! Despite strong architectural communities in perennial favorites like Boston, New York, Chicago, Seattle and San Francisco, they wanted to be here. And what about Philadelphia attracted them? With amazing consistency, they presented their answers:

There is a strong and vibrant architectural community in Philadelphia.

Housing in the city is affordable and the center is walkable.

The city is big enough to be dynamic and small enough to be friendly.

We are well situated on the East Coast, making access to other cities relatively easy.

The presence of several major universities is a huge plus.

The strong, historic traditions of Philadelphia are compelling.

The city is racially and culturally diverse.

They all sensed -- accurately, I thought -- that Philadelphia is experiencing a new growth period and the fact that it hasn't made it yet ("It's gritty") was appealing, not a turnoff. Our past, so much a focus of tourism, was seen not as a static memory but as part of an evolving future. They felt that there was opportunity for them as individuals to involve themselves in the community and be welcomed.

To be fair, the reinvention of Philadelphia did not start yesterday. It has been going on ever since people realized after World War II that this "workshop to the world" was no longer. The revitalization of Society Hill, the South Street renaissance and the restart of Manayunk predated the most recent set of events. And there were always people living downtown -- one of our greatest assets.



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

...e were announcing that they were coming here to be here, first, and graduates from architecture school is presensitized to the importance of Philadelphia is a good place, they do so with a trained eye for the urban...yers may not have made the same observations.

But the young architects' critical eyes notwithstanding, they did do comparative shopping with other cities -- and not second-tier cities, either. We competed among the best and we won. Of course, these young people have not faced some of our more daunting realities: where to bring up a family, where to send the kids to school and where to place roots.

However, their nonengagement with these problems makes their decision that much more interesting because it is largely based on quality of place -- the very thing that the Design Advocacy Group was founded to defend and the very thing that this column was intended to promote. Our point has been and still is: quality of place -- that loose set of intangibles that define the character of a city -- is as important as tangible issues of jobs, safety, taxes and schools. For those who are most able to "vote with their feet," quality of place is crucial to their decision-making.

As hard as we try to solve the many structural problems that face Philadelphia, we will never truly succeed until outsiders choose to live and work here. When they do, they bring a positive attitude and reinforcements for the tax base. All ships rise with this tide. It is essential for us to make sure that these folks come here and succeed. Keeping the city vibrant, beautiful and accessible has got to be a priority for them and for us.

Alan Greenberger is a principal of MGA Partners, Architects and a founding member of the Design Advocacy Group.



-- Respond to this article in our Forums -- [click](#) to jump there